

Evans, Lyle Robert

Lyle Robert Evans, Green Bay, died March 6, 2006, at age 64. Lyle was known for decades as one of the premier radio and television innovators in America. Through his nearly 50 year career, Lyle wore every hat there is in broadcasting including station owner. In Wisconsin alone he played major roles in the formation of no less than 14 television stations and 40 radio stations. Channel 26 WGBA-TV was founded and operated by Lyle as WLRE-TV. Until his death, he remained the licensee of several radio stations including WMBE-AM/Chilton and was the day-to-day driving force behind WMXG-FM/Escanaba.

Lyle's fascination with broadcasting began at WDUZ while a sixth-grader tagging along with his dad, "Big Lyle," who worked for the telephone company. In no time, Lyle, a wunderkind, had his own radio show and over the years conducted a number of famous Green Bay interviews with such notables as Ed Sullivan, Richard Nixon, JFK and Vince Lombardi. He was one of the last people to speak on-air with Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens after their performance at the Riverside Ballroom. Lyle also handled engineering for the William Morris Agency's "Shower Of Stars."

In his younger years, Lyle lettered on his college swim team. Barely out of his teens, He built WLOT-AM/Marinette from scratch which he ran for several years as "chief cook and bottle washer" before selling it to see more of the world.

After stints constructing stations in other parts of the country and overseas for various clients, Lyle returned to Wisconsin to originate and produce "The James Lofton Show," "First and 10 at the 50 with John Jurkovich" and "Pack Rap" which at its high water mark had 53 affiliates. His favorite annual special programming was spending each Christmas Eve broadcasting live on either television or radio a service from a Northeastern Wisconsin Church.

A cherished chapter of Lyle's very diverse and rewarding career began to be written in 2000 when two Green Bay businessmen, Mark Follott and John Cavil, approached him to express their desire to buy his WJOK-AM in hopes of programming Catholic radio. Lyle embraced their

dream and tapping into his creative mind, changed the nickname of WJOK (AM 1050), then a sports-talk station called "The Jock" to "WJOK — Jesus Our King." Thus began friendships and collaboration which has rapidly grown into the 17 station nationwide "Relevant Radio" Catholic Network. Lyle served Relevant Radio as Director of Engineering & Procurement.

Lyle was always quick to lend the power of his stations to nonprofit organizations. A generous man with a huge appetite for life, he helped countless people better themselves by sharing his talent, vast experience and extensive network of friends. The families he impacted and stations he created leave a legacy that will endure for generations to come.

Lyle was preceded in death by his mother, Helen Pytlak-Evans and father, Lyle Evans. He has no heirs and is passing on his estate to many loyal employees and several charitable organizations.

Visitation will be held at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral, Monroe Street at Doty Street, from 9 a.m. Saturday until the time of service. A rosary will be said at 10:30 a.m. in the church. Mass of Christian Burial 11 a.m. Saturday at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral with Msgr. Roy Klister officiating. WEST MASON MALCORE Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements, 499-4100. Burial will follow at Al-louez Catholic Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to the American Diabetes Association in his name, PO Box 1131, Fairfax, VA 22038-1131.

Please visit malcorefuneralhome.com to send online condolences.

Station maker looked to future

Not many viewers knew Lyle Evans, but he had an impact on area television.

Evans liked to think ahead, think of possibilities.

With glee, he talked about acquiring broadcast frequencies in TV and radio. He regularly dealt with technologies before they came in to full bloom.

He relished his part in putting the region's first commercial UHF station and first independent station on the air Dec. 31, 1980. It was WLRE, Channel 26. The call letters were his initials.

The station's early years were rocky. It had a brush with bankruptcy but survived and became WGBA.

Evans also was on hand for a special arrangement that in 1994 put WGBA under the same roof as

WACY, Channel 32.

WGBA became an NBC affiliate and added news. In 2004, it was sold for \$43.2 million.

Evans, a bystander by then, was proud:

"In 1976 when I walked around town and said I'm going to start another television station, and particularly a UHF station, there were many detractors," he said. "I just let it go in one ear and out the other, and I think the results are somewhat shown in this sale."

In one way or another, Evans was involved with seven Wisconsin TV stations.



**WARREN
GERDS**

Commentary

He was wrapped up even more in radio as owner, developer or holder of applications or construction permits, including at least nine at the time of his death March 6 at age 64.

Evans liked putting stuff together.

He'd spread out topographical maps and engineering data. At hand were phone numbers of attorneys, Federal Communications Commission staffers, programmers, on-air people, colleagues and friends.

He seemed to put stuff together for the pleasure of being able to do it. That was his joy.

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